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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000215

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SUBJECT: UN STAFFING SHORTAGES HINDER SUPPORT AS AFGHAN ELECTIONS LOOM

Classified By: PolCouns Annie Pforzheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: At the onset of Afghanistan's 2010 parliamentary elections season, the UNDP election support program in Afghanistan is crippled by significant staffing shortages, including in key leadership positions. These shortages, coupled with UN headquarters' lengthy hiring process, has left UNDP Elect and the political oversight arm of the UN mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) dramatically ill-equipped to handle their body of work. If nothing is done to accelerate the UN's replacement of personnel, key positions at UNDP Elect will not be filled for at least four months, just as the elections get underway. With UNAMA's mandate coming up for renewal in March, the future of its role here and its ability to deliver on its role in guaranteeing free, fair and credible elections, remains in question. End summary.

Alarming Inside Scoop

¶2. (C) In a January 17 email from a key UNDP staff member obtained by the Embassy, the staffer was fearful that the UNDP will be severely limited in what it can accomplish in the 2010 elections. He wrote that if the staffing issue remains unresolved, the UNDP will only be able to provide "core functions (if that) and much will need to be sub-contracted out" in 2010 elections support. Citing vacancies in a variety of key leadership and technical positions, including Chief of Operations, Head of IT, Datacenter and Electoral Software Development, Head of Logistics, (Note: the Project Manager who is also the Chief Electoral Advisor is slated to leave shortly. End note), he wrote that "the chances of having international support in place in critical positions to get the process supervised, adequately advised and moving is effectively zero." Eight UN posts that the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has deemed "critical" are unfilled. Normal turnover issues have been exacerbated by the October 2009 attack that left five UNDP staffers dead and engendered housing shortages due to security upgrades underway.

¶3. (C) The UNDP staffer charged that the UNDP has "effectively and knowingly gutted ELECT" by not allowing the recruitment process to begin until this week for these critical positions. Many lay the blame at the door of the UNDP Country Director, Manoj Basnyat. There simply now is not enough time to hire the necessary people for a May 2010 election date, which is likely (but not certain) to be pushed off for a few months. Hiring and retaining national staff has also been problematic; the UNDP Country Office is operating with a "caretaker" staff of 16, but the UNDP has made little or no progress on its contracting process required to re-sign additional staff and to bring additional staff on board.

Oversight Issues

¶4. (C) The implications of these staffing shortages loom large for the UN and for the international donor community. Our contact writes that the level of support the UN gave in 2009 is "not possible" for a spring 2010 election, even though the IEC "still requires this level of advisory intervention." As international donors consider how much financial support to provide for the 2010 elections, our contact writes the UN has "no capacity at present to monitor or guide spending." The IEC is currently drawing up budgets for the 2010 elections, but has not received any advisory support from the UN. Securing and accounting for UN elections-related assets, which are spread throughout the country in IEC and ECC offices, will become significantly harder when the Asset Manager's contract expires in March. No vacancy announcement has even been issued for this position.

¶5. (C) As SRSG Kai Eide prepares for his March 8 departure from Kabul, he has regularly appealed to international ambassadors to raise awareness on the staffing crisis. In addition to UNDP, the UNAMA SRSG office that provides political oversight is almost deserted. Eide has advocated a staffing surge to accompany the new SRSG, but the UN's hiring process seems to preclude any quick action in filling the existing vacancies, now estimated at nearly 48 percent under their new budget and staffing plan. UNAMA currently has no officer covering Parliament and just one person covering key

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issues of reconciliation and the Taliban. When one SRSG political staff member prepared to depart Kabul in early January, she was flummoxed when we asked who would cover elections after she left and could name only one person -- who was then on vacation.

¶6. (C) Embassy Kabul would appreciate assistance in raising these problems at the appropriate levels in New York and focusing the UNSC's attention on ensuring UNAMA receives adequate resources. With UNAMA's elections mandate coming up for discussion and its overall mandate up for renewal in March, the future of its role in Afghanistan and its ability to oversee free, fair and credible elections, is in question due to the simple lack of personnel.

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